

I conclude by again supporting heartily the recommendations of this report. I look forward to continuing my speech in the Main Committee.

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (10:50): I move:

That the House take note of the report.

Question agreed to.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** In accordance with standing order 39 the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

### **Health and Ageing Committee**

#### **Report and Reference to Main Committee**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (10:50): I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

### **BILLS**

#### **Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011**

##### **First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Bandt**.

**Mr BANDT** (Melbourne) (10:51): Every day in Australia, firefighters—including those who are here with us in the gallery today—put their health on the line to serve the community. They put themselves in danger to regularly protect individuals, families, towns and cities from the threat of fire and sometimes pay the ultimate price in doing so. All members of the public have a deep respect for the service that firefighters perform on our behalf, as the immediate risks are very obvious and apparent for all to see. The longer term risks are often not quite so apparent and obvious but they are nonetheless just as dangerous. I hope that this bill will go some small way to remedying those very significant and real risks.

There is no longer any debate about whether firefighting increases the risk of cancer. Numerous studies, predominantly in the US but also in Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, have demonstrated very clear links between cancer and firefighting. The largest of these, the LeMasters study of 2007 in Ohio, was conducted over 15 years and looked at dozens of fire departments and over 110,000 firefighters. Though firefighters are generally recruited from the healthiest and fittest amongst us, studies have shown time and time again that firefighters exposed to many structural fires, rather than just a single fire, have a clear increase in the risk of contracting cancer. For example, firefighters start out being 20 per cent healthier than the average member of the public, but after five years the average firefighter will have twice

the risk of contracting leukaemia and, after several years in the job, male firefighters can find themselves up to 10 times more likely to contract testicular cancer. Despite the best protective clothing and advances in technology and protective gear, firefighters in plastics fires will continue to be exposed to high levels of toxic carcinogens absorbed through the skin—and the associated increased risk of contracting cancer will remain the grisly reality.

There are around 70,000 synthetic chemicals in the average home and when they burn they produce a cancer-causing cocktail. No matter how good a firefighter's breathing apparatus is, their uniform must be able to breathe. Many firefighters will tell you of coming back from a fire—sometimes even days after a fire—and finding that the black, thick, cancer-producing smoke has found its way through their gear and into their open pores and into their skin. Other jurisdictions have acknowledged this. The overwhelming majority of states in the United States and Canada have dealt with this issue by introducing legislation to create the same presumption that my bill will create—that the occupation of firefighting is the dominant cause of the contraction of the cancer. In doing so, those states have made it easier for large numbers of firefighters to access workers compensation as a result. The last decade in particular has seen the legislation sweep from state to state in Canada and the experience of firefighters and legislators alike in implementing so-called 'presumptive legislation' across the country has been a very positive one.

The bill makes a very simple amendment to the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988. It makes a small addition to part I of the act which, if passed by the parliament, will provide that if a firefighter has been employed for a certain period before being diagnosed with one of seven types of cancer the employment will be taken to have been the dominant cause of the contraction of that cancer unless the contrary is established. The cancers are those which have been identified by the relevant studies as being the highest risk to firefighters—these are most often cancers of those areas which are the filters of the body. The bill identifies seven key cancers which have been shown to have these clear links—brain, bladder, kidney, breast and testicular cancers, as well as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukaemia—and leaves open the option of the minister adding to the list by regulation, based inevitably on wider scientific justification of course. These provisions will be restricted to those firefighters who have been actively involved in firefighting duties proper and require firefighters to have served for a minimum number of years before being diagnosed with the relevant primary site cancer. The qualifying periods are different for

each cancer and are justified, again, by the best studies available.

I do have another five minutes but I would like, with your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, and with the leave of the House, to now hand over to two other members from different political parties. I think it is a tribute to the lobbying work which has been done by the firefighters, many of whom are here today, that this is being approached in a non-partisan way. It is my hope that this bill proceeds through this place and ultimately through the Senate, with the support of all political parties.

**Ms VAMVAKINO** (Calwell) (10:56): by leave—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011 and I am very pleased to join both the member for Melbourne and the member for McMillan in jointly sponsoring the bill. I recently spoke in parliament at greater length about the need to introduce presumptive legislation for Australian firefighters, so today I simply want to reiterate my support for this very important issue and make the point that, while we all very often acknowledge the life-saving work of our firefighters in this place—and we have done it on many occasions—we also need to acknowledge the human cost that their profession bears on their health and wellbeing, as well as the cost to their families.

Presumptive legislation is a legislative instrument which stipulates the health risks directly associated with an occupation by identifying diseases or conditions that have been shown to be hazards associated with that occupation—in this case, the firefighting profession. Presumptive legislation is not without precedents. Presumptive legislation now exists in seven Canadian provinces and some 43 US states. Legislation is also now being considered in Europe. It is therefore time for this parliament to get the ball rolling on this issue and we do so today through the introduction of this private member's bill.

Scientific evidence, through international studies, has shown that there is a visibly higher rate of cancer related illnesses amongst firefighters than amongst the general population. Again, because the member for Melbourne has so comprehensively referred to the LeMasters study, which forms the basis of the international studies, I will not make any further reference to it. I simply want to make the point that the conditions identified are not an exhaustive list of diseases but rather an evidence based list of those diseases which have been identified to have a direct link with the firefighting profession. The bill identifies the main cancer related illnesses which have disproportionate rates of incidence amongst firefighters when compared with the general population. That is a very important point to make.

This is an important and timely bill relating to a very important profession and I am pleased to be part of a process which brings this issue to the attention of the House. In doing so, I acknowledge the many firefighters who are in the gallery here today, keeping a very close eye on the progress of this bill.

**Mr BROADBENT** (McMillan) (10:59): by leave—I was asked this morning on Gippsland radio why I was cuddling up to Adam Bandt on this issue of fair protection for firefighters. Although Adam is not quite my style—Maria is more my style—my answer was this: this is not about Adam Bandt or Russell Broadbent or Maria Vamvakinou or even Senator Gavin Marshall, who has been very helpful in this regard. It is actually about firefighters, their families and their future. It is not about us; it is not even about the parliament. It is the process of the parliament, which the member for Calwell has just referred to, that is important.

I commend the member for Melbourne, the member for Calwell and Senator Gavin Marshall for their support for this proposal. While I am doing that I want to commend all the firefighters who have gone before us. Recently we celebrated 100 years of the Firefighters Union in Victoria—a very important occasion. We honour those people who have gone before us and paved the way. This particular matter is about firefighters, their future and what they do for us. This parliament, rising above all other concerns, has to address the issues faced by a very specialised group in our community. If we can come on board with what has happened internationally and we can support these people in their endeavours, it is up to us as a parliament to go through these processes, investigate them and bring this legislation forward for the benefit of firefighters.

I am very proud to associate myself with firefighters right across Australia. Even as a 12-year volunteer firefighter I cannot identify what it is like to face the issues they face every day of their working lives. I wish them all the best and I hope this bill is progressed.

Bill read a first time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott):** In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

### **Carbon Tax Plebiscite Bill 2011**

#### **First Reading**

Bill presented by **Mr Abbott**.

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (11:03): I am very happy to introduce the Carbon Tax Plebiscite Bill 2011. The carbon tax which the government proposes to introduce in this term of parliament is the biggest policy change in Australia's history. It should not be introduced without giving the